

STONE MEN OF MALEKULA

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562 main way broadening out to become the dancing-ground itself, of which the sanctity is proclaimed by the dolmens and monoliths that line its sides, the women's path going parallel to it behind what is termed the "Lower" Side. Once past the dancing-ground, the women's path again joins the great way, which then proceeds to the next village dancing-ground, where it once more divides. In this way the men's path traverses all the main dancing-grounds on the island, each of which has in addition its own way down to its own beach, divided at the shoreward end into a men's path sanctified by the presence of a stone wall on which sacrifices have been performed, and a women's path marked only by the track which they have themselves made.

Dancing-ground of Pete-hul.

361 If we now follow the way inshore from Kowu we find ourselves in a minute valley, the ground gently rising on either side. After a minute or two fences appear, indicating the proximity of houses. A little further on the path widens, on the left a great banyan tree raises its mighty branches from which innumerable aerial roots redescend into the ground, and we find ourselves in the midst of an arena which is the dancing-ground of the chief village of Pete-hul. This arena is scooped out of the head of the shallow valley we have been following, which here widens, and then closes again. The tiny declivity would be almost unnoticeable were it not for the hand of man that had converted it into a place of unforgettable memory.

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562 The whole surface of the ground with its mixture of volcanic dust is scrupulously weeded, and provides an incomparably soft yet firm and resilient medium for processional and other dances. Both sides of the dancing-ground are lined with the stone monuments set up during successive Maki rites, but these sides differ in that the monuments on the left, or what in native terminology is called the "Upper" Side, are incomparably the more magnificent. Opposed to these are the comparatively insignificant stones lining the "Lower" Side behind which runs the path taken by the women, who, as stated, may not set foot on the dancing-ground proper except on stated occasions. In the lay-out of any such ground, if the land rises on either side this will invariably be chosen as the "Upper" Side, thus demonstrating the correlation between physical and spiritual height, which is a marked feature of all New Hebridean ritual. The terms "upper" and "lower" are primarily of a social and spiritual nature, and it is on the Upper Side that the chief sacrifices are made by men of high rank, those on the Lower Side being carried out only by young men and boys who have not yet, through sacrifice of the nobler grades of tusked boar, completely established their independence from the uninitiated women whose path lies immediately behind it. For men dominate society, and only those men who have performed the highest sacrifice have full access to the spirit world of the

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ancestral ghosts around whose cult the ritual which takes place in the dancing-ground centres.

Turning our backs now on the Lower Side, let us, with the aid of the panoramic view seen in the Frontispiece and Plates II and III, survey the high place where the chief sacrifices take place. From end to end the ground is about 300 feet long. Along the whole of the Upper Side, built on the slight elevation which forms one side of the valley, is a continuous platform of coral blocks carefully fitted together, rising to a height of 10 to 12 feet from the ground. This, though in appearance a continuous structure, is in fact a succession of contiguous stone-platforms on which the most important tusked boars are sacrificed.¹ On the extreme left is the enormous banyan tree already mentioned, some of the aerial roots of which have been carved away so as to form a kind of cave within the tree, where, on a part of the stone-platform rather lower than the rest, cannibal feasts were formerly held.

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To the right of this in front of the stone-platform is a small dolmen and other upright stones, and to the right of these again stands proudly the orchestra of upright slit gongs, huge trunks of forest trees transported from the mainland, hollowed out through a longitudinal slit so as to leave only a thin shell of the original trunk. Above the slit is carved an image representing the face of the ancestral ghost, whose voice speaks when the gong is sounded by hitting one side of the slit with a soft-wood stick. The nose of the image is pierced, and from it hang the jaws of the tusked pigs sacrificed in its honour on the day of consecration. The tallest of these gongs is about 12 feet high, not counting the base buried in the ground. Since no sacred object is ever removed, but simply allowed to rot where it stood, the remains of old gongs are also seen, two leaning to the right, one lying in front, now used as a seat for casual use. Four different sizes of gongs go to make up an orchestra, and the complicated and indescribably stirring rhythms they beat out are the wonder of all who have the good fortune to hear them.²

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Beyond the gongs, supported on three stakes, is a rack displaying the jaws of tusked pigs recently sacrificed in one of the innumerable performances that go to make up the protracted Maki rite. To the right of this is another small dolmen, and beyond this again is a cylindrical cane structure set up to protect a special yam and banana tree planted during the mortuary rites for an old man.³

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To the right of these again are three large dolmens. These, as will be described later,⁴ were erected at successive performances of the Maki rite (as in the case of gongs, no sacred stone object is ever removed), and are the stone altars at which other important tusked pigs are sacrificed.

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¹ For details of the sacrifices performed here and at the other stones see pp. 413 ff., 430.

² For details see pp. 311 ff.

³ See p. 350.

⁴ See p. 414.

CHAPTER XXI

MORTUARY RITES

AGE-GRADES

THE duration and elaboration of mortuary rites depend partly on the deceased individual's age and sex, and partly, if a man, on the rank which he has attained in the Maki. 561
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With regard to age, there are in common use certain terms applied to the main periods of a man's life, which may be termed age-grades. So far as I know, there are no definite limits fixed between these grades, nor any rites marking the transition from one to the other. The character of the mortuary rites varies with the grade, becoming more protracted and complicated with the advance in years. Moreover, the age-grades continue after death in such a manner that when a man dies his ghost continues to belong to the age-grade which he had attained during his lifetime, and is known, with two exceptions, by the same name, thus:

	NAME WHEN ALIVE	NAME WHEN DEAD
Male child	<i>Na-sōrik</i>	<i>Ta-mat na-sōrik</i>
Young man (Youth)	<i>Malakel</i>	<i>Ta-mat malakel</i>
Middle-aged man	<i>Seagh</i>	<i>Ta-mat seagh</i> or <i>Ta-mat malat</i> ¹
Old man (grey-headed)	<i>Na-humbe</i>	<i>Ta-mat mōt</i> ²
Very old man (white-headed)	<i>Mer-sean</i>	<i>Ta-mat mer-sean</i>

Seagh and Mer-sean.

If, leaving out the term used for a male child, we analyse the four remaining terms used during a man's lifetime, we find that there are in fact only two main terms, namely *malakel* meaning "youth" and *na-humbe* meaning "old (grey-headed) man" (already met with as an honourable term of address and variant of the widespread word *supwe*³), each of which is followed by an intermediate term containing the syllable *se*, which is in essence no more than a superlative particle. Thus the grade *malakel* is followed by the grade *seagh* composed of the superlative *se* and the

¹ *Malat* means "quickly" or "too soon," i.e. "he dies before his time." Compare the phrase *se wor malat*, "born too soon."

² *Mōt* means "grey." Compare Atchin *mūt*. But Seniang *mōt-mōt* means "black."

³ See pp. 258, 499, 693.

561 adjectival termination *agh*, and so meaning "a superlative *malakel*." In the same way the grade *na-humbe* is followed by that of *mer-sean* (sometimes pronounced *muver-sean*), formed of *mer* (or *muver*) meaning "man," the superlative *se* and the nominal termination *an*, so that the whole term means "a superlative *na-humbe*."

Malakel and na-humbe.

Of the five age-grade terms these two, *malakel* and *na-humbe*, are in fact by far the most frequently met with in everyday conversation. They represent respectively the joy and beauty of youth and the power of old age. That they are culturally also the main categories of age is seen from the fact that on the day after the birth of a boy petitions are offered to the ancestors to look after him and let him grow to be "first a *malakel* and then a *na-humbe*," the remaining grades being definitely not mentioned.¹ The same two main age-categories are observed on Atchin, where the same word *malakel* is used for "young man" and the word *na-sup* (pronounced by the old men *na-umb* and equivalent to the Vao *na-humbe*) is the honourable term for "old man." There is, however, an important sociological and religious distinction between the word used for "youth" and that used for "old man," for whereas *malakel* used for "a youth" refers to purely biological factors, being composed of *ma*, meaning "to become," and *lakel*, meaning "fecund," *na-humbe* is on the other hand primarily a religious term having to do with re-birth and thus meaning fecund in a spiritual rather than a biological sense.

BURIAL

POSITION, PLACE AND TIME

764 In Vao there is no burial on platforms or in canoes such as are found in other parts of the Northern New Hebrides, nor is there any making of artificial bodies and their subsequent preservation in the men's house such as is found in South and South-West Malekula.

Here all bodies are interred. There are, however, two chief methods of interment, namely in the extended or in the squatting position, corresponding with the two main age-grades just cited.

(a) Boys (*na-sōrik*), youths (*malakel*) and middle-aged men (*seagh*) are buried within the dwelling-house² in the extended position, the verb used for this being *torūni*. Since individuals of these age-grades are supposed to have not yet achieved the right to proceed after death to the land of the dead on the volcano, but to remain within the Cave of the Dead, there is

¹ See p. 177.

² Youths (*malakel*) are buried on the Lower Side of the house. Whether this applies also to middle-aged men (*seagh*) I do not know.

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(There is no launching of a canoe, as is the case for an old man. The whole evening and morning ceremony gives the impression of something to which the young man is not properly entitled, an imitation of the rites due to an old man, to which the younger has no right, but which is tolerated by the community so long as it is carried out *sub rosa* and no traces of it are thrust upon the public consciousness. Thus, the hut must be built by the side of the road instead of in the dancing-ground; the cane thrown on the grave evidently represents the circular fence made out of canes erected for an old man; the crying four times followed by weeping may be in imitation of the fourfold cries and weeping at the launching of the canoe; lastly, the whole of the pudding must, in the case of a young man, be finished or hidden before dawn.) 769

PERIOD OF MOURNING

The period of mourning (*taurean*) lasts for thirty, forty or one hundred days, or a year or longer, according to choice, all the dead man's kinsmen, both male and female, having to fast or abstain (*vel-val*) during this time from eating certain yams. 765 262

(This presumably corresponds to the taboo on fruit in the case of an old man.)

END OF PERIOD OF FASTING

When it is decided to put an end to this period of mourning, a day is appointed for a rite called *nagham hinagh*. The immediate relatives of the dead man lay out fowls, pigs, yams, bananas, etc., in the house-enclosure and give them to all those who have been abstaining.

OTHER PROCEDURE OMITTED

There are no mortuary officials (*talagh*) in the mortuary rites for a young man, nor is there any *Bur-tambean* or *Tulagh* rite nor any anniversary rite nor any communion feast such as takes place after the death of an old man. 767 769

WOMEN

WOMEN'S AGE AND DEGREE NAMES

Age-grades.

All women are called *Vavine*, and this term is used in reference and address for all those who have not yet received complimentary titles in connexion with the Maki. 561 •

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Age-grades are as follows:

<i>Vene sōrik</i>	Small girl.
" <i>malakel</i>	Girl with breasts (nubile).
" <i>narōmb</i>	Woman with fully developed breasts.
" <i>lagh</i>	Married woman.
" <i>seagh</i>	Married woman a little advanced in years.
" <i>mbamb</i>	Woman with child.

Complimentary titles.

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As we have seen,¹ every woman's name, given at birth, begins with the prefix *Le-*, but at every performance of the Maki, the female relatives of the sacrificers receive complimentary titles, namely:

<i>Le-tang</i>	when Maki has been sacrificed by her father.
<i>Le-lek</i>	after the first sacrifice made by her husband.
<i>Le-at</i>	after every subsequent sacrifice performed by her husband.
<i>Le-ghter</i>	when Maki has been sacrificed by her son.

There is yet further a title:

<i>Le-tete</i>	taken when the sacrifice is made by the woman herself at the women's house at a "Women's Maki," about which I unfortunately know nothing.
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Once a woman has become *Le-ghter*, she apparently remains so, becoming, as she grows older, without any rigidly demarcated age-limits, *Le-ghter e-humbe* and *Le-ghter mer-sean*.

If a man sees a married woman whose name and title he does not know, he will call her, in reference and in address, *Vavine*, *Le-lek*, *Le-at* or *Le-ghter* according to a guess at her age.

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I know very little about the mortuary rites for women, save that they also vary with age and rank.

Women bearing the titles *Le-tang*, *Le-lek* and *Le-at* are said to be buried, like young men, in their houses, with similar rites of *Atean*, Fifth Day, Seventh Day (*Ber-mavel*), Fourteenth Day (*na-lang* pudding eaten in secrecy before dawn) and *Matean*.

Very old women (*Le-ghter mer-sean*) are buried, like their male counterparts, either in the squatting or in the extended position, and either in their houses or a little way removed towards the Lodge. If very old, they may be buried in close proximity to the special places reserved for old men (*ta-mat mōt*, the ghosts of *na-humbe*). It is said that at Tolamp they are actually buried in the cemeteries of the male *mer-sean*. There are no

¹ See p. 178.